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Thursday, 26 February 2009, 10.10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Takasu	(Japan)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Jurica
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Dabbashi
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Turkey	Mr. İlkin
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Ms. Rice
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1830 (2008) (S/2009/102)

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09-24991 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1830 (2008) (S/2009/102)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Iraq, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the course of the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. De Mistura to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2009/102, which contains the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1830 (2008).

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. I warmly welcome him this morning and give him the floor.

Mr. De Mistura: I would like to thank the Council for the opportunity to brief it at a crucial point for Iraq in its empowerment to handle its own affairs. Over the past few months, the eyes of the international community have been turned towards a country immersed in pre-electoral activity as Iraqis prepared to cast their votes in the first governorate elections in four years. This undoubtedly has been the most significant political event of this reporting period.

The end of 2008 witnessed an acceleration of electoral activities and increased preparedness by the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq, with all aspects of the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) completely geared for that period towards the electoral process.

Two months into 2009, Iraq has emerged sovereign and is rising to expectations. It successfully went through the first test by delivering the first fully Iraqi-led and owned elections. On 31 January, as planned, provincial elections were conducted in 14 governorates, with 42,000 polling stations, with a striking lack of violence. That marks a remarkable event in a country that has suffered through so much conflict in recent years. It is a tribute to the growing effectiveness of the Iraqi security forces and attests to the increased stability in the country.

With the Independent High Electoral Commission in the lead, Iraqis have demonstrated the capacity to run their own elections in what has been a daunting logistical and operational undertaking. Just look at the figures: 7.5 million Iraqis turned out to cast ballots, and 14,000 candidates, representing 400 political entities, vied for 440 seats. I am glad to say that there were 3,900 women among the 14,000 candidates.

These first polls which can have a direct impact on the day-to-day lives of Iraqis can, in fact, make a major difference with respect to the new local representatives, because they are directly accountable to their own voters: it was an open list. Furthermore, they sought to rectify a problem we had in the past, namely, the sectarian imbalance in local councils. This time there was no boycott whatsoever by any significant component of the Iraqi populace.

The Independent High Electoral Commission should be commended for its highly professional

efforts, both in the effective preparations in the lead-up to the elections and during their ultimately smooth conduct. Much should be attributed to the rigorous and professional field structure in place. Resisting political pressures, the Commission remained vigilant in carrying through with the procedures, from polling day to the announcement of final results three weeks later.

With constant and intensive assistance from UNAMI, the Iraqi Electoral Commission overcame every hurdle, every time; met operational timelines; came out of a rather complicated and contentious parliamentary debate some time ago over critical electoral legislation; regulated a complex formula for the allocation of seats and the representation of minorities and women; and concluded the adjudication of formal complaints, of which there have been as many as 2,000 to date.

Following the release of provisional results on 5 February, final results were announced on 19 February, based on all valid ballots cast, including special-needs votes and those of internally displaced persons and, where appropriate, adjusted for complaints. We are now looking at the possible final certification of results, after the short appeals period, before the second week of March. But we more or less know where we are. After that the challenge will be the formation of councils, and then the nomination of governors.

While it remains up to Iraqis to interpret the results of these elections, it is heartening how all this moved along smoothly, including the fact — which I must mention again, because it is something noteworthy — that there were about 110 women among the 440 new council members nominated.

The elections were recognized as credible and transparent, both by an impressive domestic observation effort of 490,000 local, national observers — almost as many as the Iraqi army — and 413 international monitors from 25 entities, coordinated by a European Union-sponsored adviser. These elections should increase the confidence of Iraqis in their own local institutions. I would like to say *mabrouk* — congratulations — to the Iraqi Ambassador, as we said to the Prime Minister the other day: this was something that would have been a challenge in any country.

But much will now depend on the elected leaders. They need to work within their own selected electoral system. They need to prove they are capable of promoting inclusive political dialogue, striking compromises and working in coalitions. In this regard, statements by a number of Iraqi political leaders, indicating their willingness to play a part in this process and to allow others to do so, are indeed very encouraging.

Elections have undoubtedly been the flagship of our mandate during this period, dominating our efforts in recent months. The year 2009 foresees continued electoral activities, with several possible electoral events in the coming months. These could include elections for the Kurdish National Assembly set for this summer — where we have already been asked to be involved — as well as possible sub-district elections, culminating in the national parliamentary elections towards the end of this year.

UNAMI will continue to provide a significant degree of technical assistance to the Independent High Electoral Commission, as mandated by the Council and as requested by the Government and political parties of Iraq. It will also, as requested, support the Government's commitment to holding a census, which is long overdue. But UNAMI assistance, with the Council's approval, will not stop there. It will adjust to what Iraq requires at the next step of its transition.

One of these requirements is, obviously, national reconciliation. Iraq now needs to embrace this opportunity, to rise above sectarian interests and to be open to compromise and consensus. A country cannot truly attain sovereignty or achieve a lasting peace unless it instils confidence in its own institutions with respect to the rule of law and a unifying constitution, and unless it delivers basic needs. This implies a great deal of effort, and it is in this next stage that UNAMI is committed to fully support the Government of Iraq in this exercise of its own sovereignty and its assumption of accountability.

A particular concern, of which we are all aware, remains the lingering potential for tensions between the Arab and Kurdish sides in Iraq, which has had an impact on almost every aspect of Iraq's political life. This has been the cause of the lack of real progress on the vital oil law, revenue sharing and constitutional review, as well of the potential for tensions, such as the recent clashes in Khanaqin between the armed forces of the central Government and of the Kurdish region.

As we work as an honest broker, we try to promote a spirit of dialogue. UNAMI activities will see a particular shift after this electoral period and an emphasis on our initiative on the disputed internal boundaries and work on Kirkuk, including through the committee set up under article 23 of the provincial elections law. That committee is tasked by the Council of Representatives with finding a power-sharing formula for the provincial elections in Kirkuk, assessing property disputes and demographic issues.

Work in these areas, rightly a priority, is viewed as a means to contributing to lowering these sorts of tensions, in Kirkuk and elsewhere, and exploring new solutions for some of these most pressing issues. During my recent visit to Kirkuk this past December to engage with the wider community on the ground, I, frankly, detected a good momentum for Kirkukis to explore locally generated options regarding the administrative future of Kirkuk. I truly left encouraged that Kirkukis have a growing understanding of *kefaya* — enough that there is a need now to reach a compromise acceptable to all communities living there.

Part of my trip was to discuss the work of the article 23 committee, an important committee created in connection with electoral law and a very good body for introducing constructive proposals for finding a formula for the future of this area. The article 23 committee has been criticized as getting off to a slow start, so we conveyed to them the expectations and willingness of the local community to wake up and move on this, so that the committee could become more active. We have since contributed to removing some of the obstacles to its work. On 2 February, my political deputy facilitated and accompanied the committee's first visit to Kirkuk where they finally went and started working. We provided logistical, transport, security and organizational support.

We also offered secretariat support and, in fact, UNAMI has actively served as the de facto secretariat of the committee. The committee has now begun meeting, both in Bagdad and in Kirkuk. We have further offered UNAMI assistance in areas of technical expertise, and two consultants are just about to be deployed. Mediation potential will be available in case of disagreement.

UNAMI has been working in parallel on a comprehensive review of the so-called disputed areas in the governorates of Kirkuk, Salahaddin, Diyala and Ninawa, in line with its Security Council mandate and the consent given last year by the Iraqi leadership. Members will recall that the first reports came out last June. We have delayed submission of the remaining 11 reports, as we felt that we did not wish to take any initiatives in the weeks leading up to the elections. This was decided in consultation with the Prime Minister. We remain in consultation with the Iraqi Government and all concerned parties, to carefully determine the appropriate timing and process for the finalization of the whole package of analytical reports on these internally disputed areas.

We hope and believe that this package of reports will constitute probably the most in-depth and comprehensive analysis so far presented on these areas. They will examine different factors specific to the areas, including socio-economic indices, the electoral results of 2005 and 2009, injustices of past regimes, administrative history, and the post-2003 situation on the ground including demographics and security conditions. All of these make up a series of indicators that will be taken into consideration in these studies and analysis. But the ultimate responsibility for making any kind of decisions will continue to lie, first and foremost, with the Government of Iraq, the parties represented in the areas concerned, and the Kurdish regional leadership.

At the same time, the Iraqi leadership should be encouraged to advance on other fundamental issues on which we know they are interested in following up. These are at the core of tensions among the various communities. These issues include federalism, revenue-sharing and the sharing of Iraq's considerable resources, all within the framework of the constitutional review. UNAMI is available and ready to assist the Government in following up on these matters.

UNAMI will also remain committed to supporting the establishment of independent bodies, the most significant development being the legislation that has been passed providing for the creation of the Independent Human Rights Commission in Iraq.

As for international partnership, the United Nations will continue to assist the country in its standing in the international community through the International Compact for Iraq, Security Council mandates and relations with its neighbours.

On the regional front, recent months have seen the opening of embassies by Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, the Arab League and Syria. This is a very hopeful sign of the strengthened engagement with and within the region.

UNAMI will continue its involvement in this area according to its mandate, including through confidence-building bilateral initiatives and technical assistance to a support mechanism for regional cooperation based in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq. We remain in frequent contact with regional players and are committed to assisting Iraq's efforts to improve relations with its immediate neighbours. One important example has been the important relationship with Kuwait. We are hoping to be increasingly involved in helping on a number of tracks, including, for example, border maintenance, the question of missing archives and missing Kuwaitis, as well as compensation.

Most recently, we have pushed for a training project to build the capacity of Iraq's Ministry of Human Rights in the area of exhumations in order to address a pending issue, and we are facilitating the transfer of a certain number of identified tapes from Iraq to Kuwait, which will be witnessed by my friend and very active colleague Ambassador Tarasov in the coming days.

With regard to Iran, we welcome the announced establishment of a joint committee among Iraq, Iran and the United Nations to work with the Organization on demining and drug-trafficking control along the Iranian border. The committee is a tangible example of how we can facilitate concrete cooperation with regard to the border. We hope that it will soon become operational and eventually link up with the Abadan committee. We welcome the very constructive progress being made in Iraq's relations with Turkey, Jordan and, recently, Syria.

Iraq continues to make progress towards economic and social recovery. It needs to be congratulated — again, *mabrouk* — on the reforms that led to the recent cancellation of the Paris Club debt. This proves that achievement of the benchmarks of the Compact can yield immediate and positive results. It is now critical to translate those gains into concrete improvements in the lives of everyone in Iraq.

As Iraq assumes the full responsibilities of a sovereign State, its citizens will — like those of countries throughout the world — look to their leaders to provide better schools, jobs, electricity supplies and health services. Elections have proved that that is the platform on which they were overwhelmingly elected. The Iraqi people will increasingly consider improvements in those areas as the chief indicators of recovery and restored trust.

Social services and a market economy must recover from a quarter-century of hardship and conflict. For example, nearly one third of Iraq's young people are still unemployed. Many Iraqi children still attend schools with substandard classrooms, and safe water reaches only 40 per cent of Iraqi homes. There is a challenge. We know that the Iraqi Government is determined to meet that challenge, and we should help them.

Furthermore, low oil prices will make it even more important to appropriately prioritize strategies for development. Iraq's 2009 budget, now before the Council of Representatives, is 21 per cent lower than originally planned. Its capital investment portion has been cut by 38 per cent. This type of challenge is obviously being faced throughout the world, but Iraq is facing it in the context of a very delicate transitional period. That requires that investments be directed where they are most needed and can make the greatest impact on recovery and on the lives of everyone in Iraq.

These challenges can be met through a more efficient and transparent public sector and a stronger private sector. The United Nations will work with the Government to improve performance in those areas as required.

In the area of humanitarian assistance, where needs are more acute, the United Nations will continue to provide such assistance through the consolidated appeal for Iraq and the subregion. However, the appeal recognizes that the improvements in Iraq's humanitarian conditions have been substantial. Indeed, that is why we have reduced our humanitarian assistance: because Iraq has been taking many humanitarian emergencies into its own hands. The appeal also seeks to reduce the worst effects of poverty and conflict and to promote conditions conducive to the return of Iraq's displaced persons and refugees.

The International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq, to which all members have contributed, will be coming to a close by 31 December, which will be a

historic date. I remember when it was created as a trust fund intended to keep Iraq alive. It has seen $1.3 billion channelled through it since its inception. As a result of the generous contributions of all members, in particular Japan and the European Union — to which we pay tribute — it has been an invaluable tool for promoting coordinated strategic assistance inside Iraq. I am also pleased to note that, at the recent meeting on the Fund held in Naples on 18 February, both the Government of Iraq and the donors welcomed the proposal by the Deputy Special Representative for Humanitarian, Reconstruction and Development Affairs that a post-Fund mechanism be established — so that we do not lose a mechanism that has been useful — to make the Compact a more effective driver of Iraq's internal development and international partnership.

United Nations agencies, funds and programmes will also now review their own assistance frameworks in Iraq in order to promote greater compliance with the Paris Declaration, to align our work more closely with the newly prioritized Compact and to increase their presence in Baghdad to meet the challenges ahead. The International Compact for Iraq, jointly chaired by the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister and our colleague and friend Ambassador Gambari, could be the primary vehicle for all such Iraq initiatives. Following the very successful Stockholm conference, Prime Minister Al-Maliki's initiative to review and reprioritize the Compact benchmarks has the potential to make the Compact an effective driver of further follow-up in this area.

In conclusion, we have grounds for optimism, and in this Chamber it is good to feel that way sometimes. I believe that all of us should be proud of that fact — particularly the representative of Iraq, on behalf of the Iraqi people. The Government of Iraq is clearly signalling that it recognizes that this is the year to demonstrate its ability to administer a State that enjoys broad support and intends to deliver basic services and security guarantees with the support of credible and independent institutions.

Security has improved, and Iraq has asserted its sovereignty; this is a year in which that has been clearly seen. With more sovereignty comes more responsibility — responsibility to each of Iraq's communities. This is the time to build on what has been achieved since the recent provincial elections, which were the first to have been fully led by Iraq. After prolonged suffering, Iraqis have made some substantially encouraging steps. It is now up to the Iraqis themselves to heal the wounds of the past and move ahead with a common vision. Trust among the people will increase through concrete, commonly shared steps, including a federal framework, the distribution of wealth, a viable revenue sharing system, the deft handling of Kirkuk and a formula for resolving the issue of disputed internal boundaries.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the members of the Security Council have consistently supported UNAMI in being proactive and results-oriented. We will continue those efforts. However, it is ultimately up to Iraqi leaders to make sound choices, and the international community should encourage and support them in that regard.

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his very comprehensive briefing on the good progress that has been made during this period.

I now call on the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to express our thanks to your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of France, for his efforts during the month of January. Our great appreciation goes to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and to the teams of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in Iraq and New York for their tireless work in assisting the Government and the people of Iraq.

After reviewing the report of the Secretary-General on the work of UNAMI, contained in document S/2009/102, my delegation would like to make the following comments.

In the political and security areas, today the people and the Government of Iraq are proud of their achievement in having held provincial elections, which took place in a democratic and stable security situation. The elections provided a great opportunity for competition among electoral blocs and political forces and gave Iraqi citizens the freedom to select those they considered most suitable to manage their provinces and to provide the services they expect from the provincial councils. The provincial councils will be given greater powers and budgets than the outgoing councils,

including the responsibility of playing a bigger role in the advancement of the provinces' building and reconstruction and provision of services as defined by the law of provincial assemblies.

The provincial elections witnessed the competition of 14,431 candidates, 3,912 of whom were women, belonging to 401 lists and competing for 440 seats throughout 14 provinces. Participating in the elections were more than 400 observers from the United Nations and more than 800 independent international observers, as well as observers representing the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the European Union. The turnout of the elections, 51 per cent, was very good compared to participation rates in local elections in other countries.

The provincial elections that took place at the end of January are considered to be a turning point in Iraq's progress in the pursuit of building a new democracy because of the active participation of many Iraqis who boycotted the provincial elections in 2005. For example, the turnout in Ninawa was 60 per cent compared with 14 per cent during the previous elections, and Salah Ad Din province, which recorded the highest participation rate at 65 per cent, had only 15 per cent participation in the 2005 elections. The province of Anbar, where participation amounted to less than 1 per cent in 2005, reported a turnout of 40 per cent.

The participation of Iraqis who boycotted the elections in the past reflected a firm belief in elections as key mechanisms of democracy, as opposed to the use of violence to impose the will of one party on others. The Government considers the success of the elections to be an important development and a strong push towards the promotion of reconciliation and coexistence between the various components of the Iraqi people.

In accordance with the provisions of article 23 of the provincial elections law, the elections in Kirkuk have been postponed and a parliamentary committee formed to study options for power-sharing between the components of Kirkuk and to research the issues of conflict of ownership and demographic change. This committee hopes its report, when submitted to the Council of Representatives, will facilitate the process for provincial elections in Kirkuk. The Iraqi political forces agree on the substance of article 23 of the provincial elections law, which confirms the process to resolve the Kirkuk issue through constitutional and political means in order to preserve the full rights of all components of the province.

The success of the provincial elections as an important juncture in the political development of the new Iraq has caused many to express their admiration for the ability and potential the Iraqi people have shown in the preparation, organization, management and protection of their electoral process. The Secretary-General paid tribute to the circumstances surrounding the elections, saying they were impressively free of violence. Similarly, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, said that the election process was well organized by staff who all followed the same procedures and that the Electoral Commission had shown independence. He expressed his admiration for the role of Iraqi security forces by saying that the elections had proven that the Iraqi Government is capable of generating security to ensure the electoral process.

The main message that the Iraqi people want conveyed to the world through the success of these elections is the emphasis they place on building a responsible democracy through the exercise of their rights within the context of public administration, as set forth in their Constitution, in order to strengthen the democratic experience in the new Iraq.

The completion of the provincial elections in an atmosphere almost completely free of any manifestation of violence, as opposed to the more than 80 security incidents during the elections of 2005, confirmed two basic facts. First, it demonstrated the great development in the capabilities of Iraqi Security Forces, which performed in a professional and qualified manner, and the effective presence of which was felt on the ground, making the elections the first witness of their efficiency, but not the last. This conclusion was also reached by the Secretary-General, who states in his report that "[the] almost complete absence of violence during the elections can to a large extent be attributed to the growing effectiveness of the Iraqi Security Forces" (*S/2009/102, para. 20*).

Secondly, the elections demonstrated the solid gains made in Iraq's security situation thanks to the Government's efforts to strengthen the political, security and law enforcement fields — the pillars of

stability in the country. Anti-terrorism authorities in Iraq oversaw the destruction of 51 terrorist networks in 2008, enhancing security gains achieved by the ongoing commitment of the Government of my country to support efforts towards national reconciliation and political dialogue with the various parties involved in the country's political process.

The Governments of Iraq and the United States have reached a new security agreement to organize the future bilateral partnership between our independent and sovereign nations which share the common goals of protecting and promoting the interests of our two countries and reinforcing Iraqi sovereignty and independence.

The termination of the mandate of the multinational force in Iraq is an important turning point for Iraq and the end of an era for the United Nations and for, above all, the countries contributing to the force. The multinational force has contributed vital support to the progress of building security and stability in Iraq and towards our transition to a sovereign, federal and united democracy.

On behalf of the Government and the people of Iraq, I wish to convey a very important message of thanks to the men and women of the multinational force in Iraq, who have courageously fought together with us on the frontline, as well as to their Governments.

The acceleration of improvement in the security situation in Baghdad and other provinces has helped to return life to normality in most areas. Displaced families returning to their places of origin numbered about 40,000 by the end of 2008, and one of the largest camps for internally displaced persons, in the province of Najaf, has been closed after the return to their places of origin of 300 families that were living there. My Government has been working tirelessly on the restitution of property, pursuant to order 101, and on assistance to returning displaced families, pursuant to order 102, by providing the appropriate conditions for their return to their livelihoods and their areas of origin.

Continued efforts by the Iraqi Government, in cooperation with international organizations and aid agencies, to secure the full return of the Christian families displaced by violence in some parts of Ninawa province late last year have led to the return of 2,400 out of 2,500 displaced families, and the Iraqi Government is still providing the remaining families with necessary assistance.

As part of the Iraqi Government's continuing efforts to ensure the return of displaced Iraqis in neighbouring countries, the Minister of Displacement and Migration, Mr. Abdul Samad Rahman Sultan, recently headed a ministerial delegation to Syria on the first leg of a trip that included stops in Egypt and Lebanon. The goal of the trip was to coordinate with these countries in organizing the return of Iraqis displaced onto their territory, and to explore with the immigration ministers of Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt the problems and constraints involved in the return of Iraqi citizens in order to develop effective mechanisms to overcome such problems and to contribute to the return of all Iraqis to their places of origin. It is important here to refer to the recent report issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which referred to the return of 220,000 Iraqis in 2008 and to the expected return of 500,000 Iraqis in 2009 due to the steady improvement of security in the country.

The Government of Iraq, convinced of the need to consolidate and strengthen the rights of the Iraqi people through the establishment of independent institutions dealing with the follow-up and monitoring of human rights, ratified on 14 January 2009 a law establishing a High Commission for Human Rights under the provisions of article 61 of the Iraqi Constitution. The Commission will strive to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights in Iraq and to protect the rights and freedoms set forth in the Constitution, laws, treaties, and international agreements ratified by Iraq.

My Government attaches particular importance to the issue of human rights for Iraqi detainees in custody pending criminal cases, as demonstrated by the creation of places of detention appropriately equipped to provide full legal immunities and procedures to ensure a fair trial. On 22 February 2009, the central Baghdad prison was opened to the press as part of the Iraqi Government's policy of ensuring the highest degree of transparency in following up on the conditions for detainees in Iraqi jails.

On the social and economic front, the tangible improvement in Iraq's political and security situation has had a positive effect on the national development strategy. A clear improvement has been recorded in

Iraqi economic indicators during the past few months. The rate of economic growth at the end of 2008 was 44.2 per cent. Inflation decreased from 16 per cent in 2007 to 12 per cent in the last quarter of 2008 as a result of financial policies aimed at decreasing inflation and improving the purchasing power of the Iraqi dinar. Unemployment has also decreased, falling from 17 per cent in 2008 to 15 per cent at the beginning of 2009. These economic indicators reflect a comprehensive improvement in the Iraqi economy.

Investment is a priority for the Iraqi Government's national financial and economic policies. The Government has allocated $12 billion of the national budget for investment activities for all Iraqi ministries and has established a national monitoring mechanism to encourage Iraqi ministries to spend the allocated investment funds on their projects.

My Government, in the light of obligations under the International Compact with Iraq, has signed a number of bilateral agreements with Paris Club countries by which those countries are to cancel nearly $45 billion of our total national debt, which totals more than $52 billion. A bilateral agreement and memorandum of understanding have also recently been signed with Greece and China, under which our debt to those countries is reduced by 80 per cent.

The Iraqi Government has established a social security network to support different social sectors, including orphans, widows and the unemployed. The Government has allocated 800 million dinar for this purpose and increased the number of small loans to 120,000 for 2009 from 75,000 in 2008.

Within the framework of economic policies aimed at reconstructing the Iraqi industrial sector, the Government has allocated an investment budget of up to $697 million to the Ministry of Industry for the rebuilding many of its ministerial institutions in an effort to diversify sources of national income.

With regard to the oil industry, the Iraqi Government has adopted new policies to reconstruct and develop this field. According to the latest reports issued by the Iraqi Oil Ministry, oil production increased by 11 per cent in 2008 and daily production increased from 1.85 million barrels to 2.28 million barrels. The Iraqi Government has also joined the international Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative to establish a monitoring mechanism for its oil revenues and ways of spending them.

In the area of basic services, the Iraqi Government has reduced the proportion of the population deprived of water and sewage systems to 10 per cent in urban areas and 30 per cent in rural areas. The production of electricity has risen significantly during the last three months, and the Iraqi Government has allocated more than $3 billion to the Ministry of Electricity to build new power stations.

In the framework of the Iraqi Government's efforts to support the educational process in the country, the Ministry of Education has signed bilateral cooperation protocols with support organizations such as UNICEF and the Iraqi Ministry of Housing and Reconstruction. This initiative supports the Government's national plan for the building of schools, under which, so far, 291 schools have been constructed and 374 restored to receive students in the current school year.

At the regional and international levels, the Iraqi Government continues its efforts to monitor and coordinate the work of the committees on refugees, energy and security within the framework adopted at the meetings of the Foreign Ministers of the Expanded Neighbouring Countries of Iraq held in Sharm el-Sheikh and Istanbul. The Refugees Committee held its meeting in Amman on 15 November 2008. The Security Coordination Committee meeting was held in Damascus on 22 and 23 November 2008. I would like to stress my Government's commitment to cooperating fully with our neighbouring countries to reach solutions to all issues of mutual interest.

The past few months have seen mutual visits between a number of Iraqi and international officials. This month, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier paid visits to Iraq. The President of Iraq, Jalal Talabani, visited Kuwait to participate in the Arab Economic Summit, and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki visited Iran and Turkey to develop mechanisms for bilateral cooperation with both countries. It should also be noted that the Iraqi-Kuwaiti joint committee is to hold a meeting in Kuwait this month to sign an accord to ensure a common vision for resolving the outstanding issues between the two countries and, in mid-March of next year, will hold a meeting at the ministerial level.

Following the first annual review of the International Compact with Iraq held in Stockholm, the Iraqi Government has taken many steps to enhance and

support policies to accomplish all requirements through the Joint Monitoring Matrix of 2008, in which the necessary steps to launch the administrative and financial reform process were determined. In this regard, my delegation would like to encourage all Arab countries to help their brothers in Iraq by forgiving Iraq's debt and reducing its compensation obligations imposed after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, a crime committed by the former dictatorial regime. My Government welcomes the Kuwaiti Government's agreement to address the issue of compensation through bilateral negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations Compensation Commission.

In the framework of positive cooperation with the United Nations and our brothers in Kuwait, during meetings of the technical subcommittee early next month and in the presence of United Nations High-Level Coordinator, Mr. Gennady Tarasov, my Government will hand over a large number of audio and video tapes to Kuwait as a gesture of goodwill and in order to gather impetus for nations to terminate the international mandate relating to this file.

In reference to the recommendation contained in paragraph 72 of the report of the Secretary-General, my Government strongly supports the process of reviewing those Security Council resolutions pertaining to Iraq subsequent to resolution 661 (1990) and in accordance with the fifth operative paragraph of resolution 1859 (2008). These reviews represent a key step in support of the international community's efforts to normalize relations between Iraq and its neighbours and contribute to security and stability in the region.

In conclusion, I would like to stress my Government's gratitude for UNAMI's role in Iraq and for Mr. De Mistura's support, offered at the Government's request and based on mutually agreed mechanisms.

The President: I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make a statement.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for the report he has just given us of the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). I also thank the Permanent Representative of Iraq for the extremely valuable information he has conveyed to us.

To begin with a very general observation, we are encouraged by the positive developments in the situation in Iraq, which were very well underscored in the presentations we have just heard. We note in particular the success of the democratic provincial elections held on 31 January 2009, which represent a first in Iraq's political life. In a country facing internal conflict and violence, the elections were eloquent testimony to the capacity of the Iraqi forces to guarantee the security of the people and a reassuring omen for the upcoming legislative elections. The lack of any major incident during the entire electoral period is a clear indication that the Iraqis are gradually reasserting control over their country and their future.

Another element to be taken into consideration in the general easing of tensions is the conclusion on 27 November 2008 of the bilateral security agreement between the United States and Iraq concerning the progressive withdrawal of United States forces and the transfer of authorities to the Iraqi Government.

With respect to the activities of UNAMI itself, we are gratified to note that the Mission continues to make an important contribution to national reconstruction efforts in Iraq. In particular, the personal involvement of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the outstanding role played by UNAMI were decisive to the organization of democratic, free and transparent elections and to the improvement of the political and institutional processes.

Another achievement to be attributed to UNAMI is its technical assistance in settling the various internal border disputes and in the search for consensus on the status of Kirkuk. Equally deserving of praise are UNAMI's investment in a regional dialogue through the strengthening of bilateral relations between Iraq and its neighbours, as well as its ongoing constitutional and legislative support in the context of the development of Iraqi national institutions. We cannot fail, either, to mention UNAMI's commitment to humanitarian assistance.

On the economic front, the International Compact with Iraq is playing an ever more critical role within the existing mechanisms for the reconstruction of Iraq. In that regard, we welcome the United Nations assistance strategy concluded between the Iraqi Government and the Organization for the period 2008-2010, which fully satisfies expectations in that respect,

as well as the cancellation of Iraq's debt by the Paris Club.

However, the United Nations and the entire international community must extend further support to the Iraqi Government, which now faces a budgetary deficit due to the fall in oil prices, and assist it in meeting the challenge of socio-economic development. That aspect of development now appears to be more critical than ever to Iraq, where the positive political developments on the ground must be reflected in a reduction of poverty and improved delivery of basic social services. Furthermore, that improvement should be extended to the field of human rights, which remains at the heart of UNAMI's concerns, although the role of the Iraqi Government and of the multinational force are also crucial in that regard.

We welcome the progress represented by the enactment by the Council of Representatives on 16 November 2008 of the law establishing an Independent High Commission for Human Rights, and the commitment of the Iraqi authorities to work with UNAMI to ensure the Commission's proper functioning.

With the reduced role of the multinational force, which will lead to an enhanced role for UNAMI, particularly with respect to security, it would be highly advisable, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2009/102), to provide the Mission with a new operational base endowed with a reliable logistical infrastructure in order to strengthen its autonomy and its capacity to discharge its mandate effectively and fully. We are pleased to note that UNAMI is already at work on that plan, and it is our hope that it will achieve concrete results.

We urge the international community to continue to support the Mission at this critical phase of its operations. In conclusion, we fully support Iraq and encourage it in its efforts to achieve national recovery at every possible level.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I wish to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, for his detailed briefing today on the situation in Iraq and the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). My delegation thanks Mr. De Mistura for his work and for his contribution and commitment to the development of political dialogue and national reconciliation in Iraq.

We also thank Ambassador Hamid Al Bayati, Permanent Representative of Iraq, for his comprehensive presentation on the recent progress made by his country.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2009/102) before the Security Council today is of special importance, for two fundamental reasons.

First, it represents the first time that the Council has been informed on the situation in Iraq since the expiration of the mandate of the multinational force and since the bilateral security agreement between the United States and Iraq entered into force. Pursuant to that agreement, the United States forces will be placed under the authority of the Iraqi Government for the remainder of their presence in the country. That concrete fact is deeply symbolic for my country, particularly given the conditions in which the war in Iraq unfolded and the subsequent establishment of the multinational force. The facts behind those developments are well known, and Mexico has expressed its views thereon on previous occasions. The bilateral security agreement also represents a tremendous achievement for the Government and people of Iraq because, through it and with the help of the provisions of resolution 1859 (2008), adopted in December, Iraq will gradually recover its international position as a sovereign and independent State.

Secondly, the Secretary-General's report has been submitted in the context of the provincial elections held on 31 January. We thank the Independent High Electoral Commission and the staff of UNAMI for playing key roles in ensuring that the elections were carried out in the optimal conditions. We were particularly pleased to note that the electoral process unfolded calmly and without major incident, as noted by several national and international observers. Their success demonstrates the commitment of the people of Iraq to democracy.

The results of the elections, announced in early February, represented a triumph for the people of Iraq and for democracy as a whole. Iraqis have turned once again to the ballot box to settle their political disputes, thereby contributing to the process of national reconciliation essential to the establishment of normal living conditions for the majority of the people.

The successful implementation of the national security plan for the elections undoubtedly favoured voter participation, in particular among the Sunni

population, which refrained from participating in the 2005 provincial elections. This time, they were part of the process. We hope that the results of the electoral process will promote political dialogue between the various players in Iraq and consolidate the national reconciliation process. We also hope that this exercise will lay the foundations for the preparation of national elections in December 2009.

Despite the great and important progress to which we have been witness in recent months, significant challenges remain in Iraq that must be faced with the support of the international community and the United Nations. In the area of security, the situation on the ground is fundamentally different to that of previous years. However, we continue to receive numerous reports of indiscriminate attacks against civilians, Iraqi armed forces, foreign forces and United Nations personnel. We are confident in the ability of the Government and the armed forces of Iraq to continue to deal with this major serious problem, with consistent respect for human rights.

The continuing situation of insecurity has led in recent years to continuous flows of internally displaced persons and refugees, which undermines Iraq's long-term development. We therefore welcome the report that some 40,000 families repatriated to Iraq have been registered to date. We invite the Iraqi authorities to continue to work with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to pursue this process, ensuring that the dignity of individuals is respected at all times. We also welcome the adoption of the law establishing an Independent High Commission for Human Rights. We hope that the establishment of the Commission, along with the commitments arising from Iraq's recent ratification of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, will lead to progress on human rights, in particular with respect to the situation of detainees, the administration of justice and women's rights.

Likewise, we are closely following the work on a comprehensive rule of law strategy, under United Nations auspices. We consider that only through institution-building can long-term political and economic success be guaranteed in Iraq.

I recognize the work of UNAMI in Iraq and the important role it has played in establishing the situation we now see on the ground. As international financing for reconstruction and development diminishes, the work of UNAMI becomes even more relevant, in particular its strategies to support the fight against poverty and initiatives towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, its work to protect ethnic and religious minorities and its efforts to strengthen the education and health sectors. In addition, UNAMI will have an invaluable opportunity to continue to help the people and the Government of Iraq through key initiatives such as the International Compact for Iraq, the holding of local and national elections, the national assistance strategy and the establishment of the Independent High Commission for Human Rights.

For Mexico, it is important that UNAMI, together with other relevant actors, continue to give priority to supporting the approximately 2.8 million internally displaced persons. We therefore welcome the establishment of the cooperation mechanism of the 2009 consolidated appeal, which the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has promoted with a view to helping the most vulnerable people within the country, to supporting refugees in conditions of security and dignity, and to promoting a regional approach to guarantee the security of Iraqis. Likewise, it is important that UNAMI continue its work in the constitutional review process under way in Iraq. That will help Iraq to consolidate the rule of law and provide guarantees for Iraqis in the sphere of civil and political rights.

In our view, we should continue to pay close attention to UNAMI's role as an intermediary in resolving controversies on internal borders and the status of Kirkuk, which are indispensable elements for lasting peace in Iraq.

The meeting of the objectives I have just described and the significant progress we have seen in recent months in the light of a new international situation indicate that 2009 holds a promising future for Iraq. This should be consolidated with the support of the United Nations and the international community.

Mr. Dabbashi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his comprehensive briefing. We welcome our brother, Mr. Hamid Al Bayati, Permanent Representative of Iraq, and we thank him for his valuable contribution to our discussion today.

In our view a recent political development in Iraq is of great importance: the holding of provincial elections in January in 14 out of Iraq's 18 governorates. This is reason for optimism, in particular because of the high level of participation in the elections, which is especially encouraging owing to the participation of certain sectors and factions that had boycotted the previous elections, held in 2005. We are also gratified by the continued improvement in security conditions, with a major decline in violence and the absence of significant incidents on election day. This further underscores the continuing improvement in the capacity of Iraqi security forces and the decline in sectarian sensitivities.

We commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) for their efforts to support the Independent High Electoral Commission during the preparations for the elections held on 31 January, and for their endeavours to resolve disputes with regard to Iraq's internal borders. We urge UNAMI and the Special Representative to continue to play their neutral role in building confidence among the parties concerned, in encouraging dialogue and consultation and in working together with the Iraqi Government to achieve consensus among all parties concerned.

We stress the importance of continued dialogue among Iraqi actors concerning federalism and hydrocarbon regulation, which are two important issues that must be resolved in order to bring about long-term stability in Iraq. We look forward to the discussions to be held before the parliamentary recess, which will continue to follow up the round table hosted by UNAMI with a view to identifying specific, concrete and feasible solutions.

We congratulate our Iraqi brethren on the Paris Club's cancellation of Iraq's debt in December 2008. This is recognition of Iraqi efforts to attain the internationally agreed development goals and of Iraq's ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. This augurs well for the country's economic and social development. We welcome the fact that the United Nations and the World Bank established an Iraq Partners Forum in November 2008 in order to coordinate the strategies of donors and of the United Nations for Iraq and to ensure the greatest possible transparency and effectiveness.

With respect to the humanitarian situation, we are most satisfied with the continued return and repatriation of Iraqi internally displaced persons and refugees. Nearly 40,000 returnee families had been registered in Iraq as of the end of 2008, which is a great achievement, and one of Iraq's largest camps for internally displaced persons, in Najaf, was closed. But we are still gravely concerned at the continued presence of millions of Iraqi refugees outside the country, in particular in neighbouring countries. We hope that the Iraqi Government will attach priority to their return and will bring about the appropriate circumstances for that to take place. Moreover, we would like to express our satisfaction at the decline in the rate of cholera infection and we welcome the deployment of an international field mission under the leadership of the World Health Organization in the affected provinces.

Despite the progress achieved in the humanitarian field throughout 2008, the circumstances of the vulnerable sectors of the Iraqi people and the internally displaced persons are still a source of concern. Even relief programmes have been delayed because of the lack of funding and, as the report of the Secretary-General (S/2009/102) notes, 1 million Iraqis still face food insecurity and a further 6 million would be exposed to food insecurity were it not for the social security network, primarily the public distribution of food rations.

We note the rise in the illiteracy level to 24 per cent in southern Iraq and that the school drop-out rate has reached 10 per cent, while the level of chronic child malnutrition in the South has reached nearly 22 per cent. With regard to northern Iraq, it is still suffering unstable and fluctuating power supplies, which is a very important element in the living conditions of the people. We support the United Nations call for investment to be concentrated in those areas where the weakest humanitarian and development indicators have been registered, as well as those affected by conflict-related violence and population movements.

There has been concrete progress towards ensuring the human rights of Iraqi citizens through the enactment of a law establishing an Independent High Commission for Human Rights, but we are still concerned by the killings of some political candidates and electoral workers and the displacement of nearly 2,400 families from their homeland in Mosul at the end

of 2008, as well as by killings of and other attacks on journalists, teachers, parliamentarians, humanitarian workers, judges and lawyers.

We are gravely concerned by the occupying forces' continued detention of more than 15,000 people, including 58 children, without arrest warrants issued by Iraqi judges. I would like to underscore our concern with regard to the general conditions of the detainees under Iraqi custody, as noted in paragraph 47 of the Secretary-General's report. Some have been deprived of their freedom for months and years in substandard conditions, without access to defence counsel and without being formally charged with a crime or brought before a judge.

We welcome the end of the mandate of the multinational force in Iraq and the Iraqi Government's assumption of responsibility for security in the country. We look forward to the full withdrawal of all occupying forces from Iraq as soon as possible and the reunification of the Iraqi people, and welcome the emphasis on its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We would like to emphasize that the continued presence of the occupying forces in any form could be a factor for disunity and instability and would not contribute to national reconciliation, which is considered to be an indispensable condition for the stability, reconstruction and economic growth of Iraq.

The situation in Iraq has changed since the Security Council adopted resolution 661 (1990). It is time for the Council to review that resolution and for Iraq to recover the legal and international status that prevailed before the adoption of that resolution and the sanctions imposed on it in accordance with Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. Here, we would like to recall the request to the Secretary-General to prepare a report on this matter in consultation with the Iraqi Government in accordance with resolution 1859 (2008). We look forward to the issuance of that report and to the Council's subsequent adoption of measures in that regard.

In conclusion, we would like to express our great appreciation for the efforts undertaken by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the various United Nations agencies working on Iraq's reconstruction. We call upon all States to support Iraq in order to help its brotherly people.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Representative De Mistura for his important and informative briefing. We are also grateful for the statement made by Ambassador Al Bayati and the encouraging developments that he has pointed to in his country. We commend the determined and courageous work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). We deeply appreciate the Special Representative's dedication to Iraq and its people, in particular against the background of the difficult circumstances he and his team continue to encounter.

The support provided by UNAMI to the Independent High Electoral Commission and the Government of Iraq's diligent preparation of the recent provincial elections have clearly contributed to their successful conduct. Above all, however, the people of Iraq are to be congratulated on their active participation in those elections. By turning out across communitarian lines, the men and women of Iraq have thus helped their country to take a significant step towards the consolidation of democratization and national reconciliation.

The security preparations by the Government of Iraq provided voters with an environment in which they were able to cast their votes with confidence and in relative security. While we deplore some of the grave incidents and acts of violence that took place in the run-up to the elections, the day of the election itself passed in a peaceful atmosphere.

We are confident that Iraqi leaders will seize the momentum created by the elections to overcome obstacles towards national reconciliation. In that context, we welcome the fact that UNAMI has been formally requested to continue to provide assistance to the parliamentary committee dealing with issues of power-sharing, property and demography regarding Kirkuk. We strongly support the good offices of the Special Representative in building confidence among the parties with a view to achieving a sustainable solution.

We encourage Iraq to make maximum use of the support provided by UNAMI in the constitutional review process, in particular as regards hydrocarbon regulation. Let me add that progress in that area will certainly also facilitate foreign investment in the country.

The European Union and its member States remain firmly committed to supporting Iraq in building a secure, stable, democratic, unified and prosperous

country where human rights can be enjoyed in a secure environment by women and men alike.

We note the gradual improvement of the security situation in recent months, but we must not lose sight of the persistent security risk that average Iraqis continue to face through indiscriminate attacks, including by suicide bombers. The recent attack on pilgrims en route to Karbala, with many women and children amongst the dead, testifies to that ever-present threat.

As others have said, there are still important challenges in the area of human rights. As has also been mentioned, the report highlights the situation of detainees. It also pays particular attention to the situation of women, children and persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities.

We hope that the return of a significant number of Christian families to Mosul is an indication of their growing confidence in their personal safety. There must be no room for ethnic or sectarian violence. Everyone must make every effort to ensure that events like those of the fall of 2008 do not reoccur.

We welcome the commitment made by the Iraqi Government to strengthen the protection of human rights and the recent establishment of an Independent High Commission for Human Rights, to which the Special Representative referred. We hope that the High Commission will soon become operational. We support and commend the important work of UNAMI in the area of human rights.

We welcome the priority that United Nations agencies intend to place on countering violence against women during the year 2009, improving the access of women to justice and tackling the reform of discriminatory penal codes. We encourage the Iraqi leadership to seek to engage women in the rebuilding of Iraqi society and to continue the efforts that have already begun in that area.

We hope that the forensic capacity-building that the UNAMI Human Rights Office has offered to the Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights will help to advance progress in clarifying the fate of Kuwaiti citizens who have been missing since 1990, a point to which the Ambassador also referred.

With regard to the situation of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons, we hope that an environment permitting their return in safety and dignity can be sustained and that the Government of Iraq will actively continue to promote return initiatives. We hope that the encouraging trend to which the Ambassador has referred will continue. Austria commends the humanitarian work of the United Nations and — this is particularly important — the continued solidarity of neighbouring countries, especially Jordan and Syria, with those uprooted by violence and conflict.

We welcome the intention of the United Nations to devise a comprehensive rule of law strategy in cooperation with other partners on the ground, as well as efforts under way between Iraqi authorities, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Vienna to assess compliance with the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

Together with our European Union partners, we continue to support the training of Iraqi law enforcement and security personnel in the framework of the European Union Integrated Rule of Law Mission, which has been extended until 30 June 2009. Since its start in July 2005, approximately 2,000 Iraqi criminal law experts have been trained in 87 courses. Austria is happy to have been able to participate in those important efforts.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of Austria's wholehearted support for his work and the work of the entire United Nations team in Iraq.

Sir John Sawers (United Kingdom): Can I begin by joining colleagues in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General De Mistura for his briefing on the report (S/2009/102) of the Secretary-General. I would also like to pay tribute to the Permanent Representative of Iraq for the remarkable progress that Iraq has made in recent months, as set out in his statement.

The United Nations continues to play a vital role in Iraq's development as a stable and democratic country that is increasingly in control of its own destiny. On behalf of my Government, I would like to thank the United Nations Iraq team for its work.

No country has taken up more of the Security Council's time and energy over the past 20 years than Iraq. It is wonderful to see Iraq restored to a fully respected position in the international community, and

for the Council to be able to deal with its few remaining responsibilities in such an encouraging atmosphere. Since we discussed the last report (S/2008/688) of the Secretary-General, in November, Iraq has passed two more important milestones. The first was at midnight on 31 December 2008, when the Government of Iraq took responsibility for maintaining security throughout the country. That is a testament to the progress that has been made by both the Government and the Iraqi security forces over the past almost six years. With violence at its lowest levels since 2003, Iraq's security situation continues to improve.

The second milestone was the provincial elections, about which Mr. De Mistura has reported in detail. The Secretary-General has termed them the first fully Iraqi-led and Iraqi-owned elections. The electoral legislation was Iraqi. The Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq, working with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), put in place the processes and mechanisms to ensure a free and fair ballot, and the Iraqi security forces provided comprehensive security and ensured that there were no significant security incidents on election day. Significantly, the elections were both competitive and inclusive. Voting was conducted in a relaxed atmosphere and freedom of expression was widely respected. The diverse representation in the new provincial councils shows that democracy is taking root in Iraq.

As the Secretary-General acknowledges in his report, it is now important for Iraq's political leaders to prioritize national dialogue and reconciliation, finding common ground on issues such as the hydrocarbons legislation and the review of the Constitution. The United Kingdom strongly supports UNAMI's efforts behind that process, in particular its work on disputed internal boundaries and on the status of Kirkuk, which the Special Representative reported on. We look forward to the report on Kirkuk from the article 23 committee of Iraq's Council of Representatives, which we expect at the end of next month.

We also welcome the establishment of Iraq's Independent High Commission for Human Rights. We encourage it to work with the Ministry of Human Rights in helping to ensure that the rights of all Iraqis are respected.

The United Nations is doing vital work across all the policy sectors in Iraq, from supporting elections, constitution and political development, the rule of law and humanitarian assistance to economic development. We are encouraged by the Secretary-General's intention to continue to expand the engagement and presence of the United Nations throughout Iraq. We also await with interest his report pursuant to resolution 1859 (2008) on the Saddam-era resolutions. We should look carefully at all the additional obligations imposed on Iraq during the Saddam era, with a predisposition to removing them so that Iraq can achieve the international standing equal to that that it held before the Council's adoption of resolution 661 (1990).

I would like to conclude by outlining the further evolution in the United Kingdom's close relationship with Iraq. The British Prime Minister announced on 18 December 2008 that British combat troops will withdraw from Basra in the coming months. Our current military tasks should be completed by 31 May, allowing the majority of our forces to withdraw from Iraq by the end of July. Our military drawdown reflects the improvements in the security situation in Iraq. It marks a change in the nature of our commitment to Iraq as Iraq increasingly stands on its own feet. The United Kingdom's future relationship with Iraq will be one of partnership and friendship across the board, encompassing economic, commercial, cultural and educational cooperation, as well as assistance with security and defence.

The United Kingdom strongly believes that a strong and stable Iraq that is at peace with its neighbours and has taken its rightful place in the international community will make a crucial contribution to strategic stability and peace throughout the Middle East.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I, too, would like to thank our friend Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, for his briefing to the Council. I should also like to commend the courageous, determined and effective efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in carrying out the mandate entrusted to it by the Security Council. I also wish to thank our colleague the Permanent Representative of Iraq for his detailed briefing on developments in the situation.

As he himself emphasized, there has been significant progress in Iraq in recent months towards the establishment of a secure, stable, democratic, united and prosperous country where human rights are respected. France congratulates the Government of Iraq on its efforts in that regard. We reiterate our willingness to continue and strengthen our contribution to ensuring stability and prosperity in Iraq.

The holding of provincial elections on 31 January 2009 was an important step towards strengthening democracy and reconciliation. As was the case, it is important that the elections were well-organized and conducted in an inclusive manner and in an overall peaceful environment. This month, the Security Council, the Secretary-General and the ministers for foreign affairs of the European Union have welcomed the holding of those elections.

The elections were, first and foremost, a triumph for the people of Iraq, who have assumed full ownership of the democratic process. France is very pleased that the Iraqis are increasingly reassuming full responsibility for their country's affairs. The Iraqi Government should also be congratulated on having organized these elections. Finally, we welcome the key role played by UNAMI, in support of the Independent High Electoral Commission, in preparing the elections.

As noted by European Union Ministers for Foreign Affairs on 23 February, it is important to take advantage of the outcome of the elections to make further progress on improving the living conditions of the Iraqi people and on the process of national reconciliation. This means continuing the positive commitment of the Iraqi Government, of the entire international community and of neighbouring States.

I would like to focus briefly on four important areas in this regard. First of all, the disputed internal boundaries are an issue, particularly with regard to Kirkuk. This issue will be a focus of attention, as the Secretary-General emphasized in his report. UNAMI must continue to provide its expertise to the Iraqi Government in order to make progress on this question, as well as on the matter of constitutional review. Success in this difficult task will depend in large part on — and will be a gauge of — the willingness of all actors to work towards a compromise.

Secondly, reconstruction and economic growth are also great challenges for the coming year. The Iraqi people expect concrete results. France has cancelled €4 billion, or $5 billion, of Iraqi debt, and we are prepared to contribute in all areas requested by the Iraqi authorities.

Thirdly, UNAMI must also continue to support the efforts of neighbouring countries to make progress in the areas of energy, security, borders and refugees and internally displaced persons. We also believe that its assistance will be useful in supporting the regional dialogue that should continue on issues such as disappeared persons and property seized during the Gulf war. Neighbouring States, of course, have a major role to play in this respect, and we appreciate the reference to these relationships that was made by the Permanent Representative of Iraq.

Finally, efforts must also continue with regard to respect for human rights, including with regard to the situation of prisoners. As noted by the Secretary-General, the creation of an Independent High Commission for Human Rights is a positive first step.

The visit of the President of the French Republic to Iraq on 10 February was a solemn indication of France's resolute support for democracy, for the restoration of sovereignty and for reconstruction efforts in Iraq. This visit followed two visits by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Bernard Kouchner, in August 2007 and June 2008. These visits provided an opportunity to clearly demonstrate the solidarity of France. At the same time, we have cancelled debt and have actively participated in the European Union programme for training Iraqi civil servants under the Union's Integrated Rule of Law Mission for Iraq. Depending on the wishes of the Iraqi authorities, we could deploy our efforts in all institutional and economic areas.

More generally speaking, it is important that the present positive cycle will enable Iraq to recover its full sovereignty. In this respect, we would recall the request made by the Security Council in resolution 1859 (2008) for the Secretary-General to prepare a report after consultations with Iraq on the action necessary to enable Iraq to recover international standing equal to that which it held prior to the adoption of resolution 661 (1990) of August 1990.

As was indicated by the French President in Baghdad on 10 February, Iraq can count on the friendship of France as we work with it towards its full reintegration into the community of nations.

Mr. Rugunda (Uganda): Uganda welcomes the holding of this open debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the briefing by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and head of UNAMI. We also welcome the briefing by the Permanent Representative of Iraq.

From those briefings it is clear that significant progress has been made. We welcome the successful holding of provincial elections on 31 January. We note with appreciation that those elections were more representative and inclusive of the various political sectors of Iraqi society. We encourage the Iraqi people to build on these achievements, which create a more stable and peaceful Iraq in which all the people of Iraq can live in peace.

To that end, Uganda also commends the leading role played by UNAMI in assisting and supporting the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq as well as the earlier interim Government and transitional National Assembly of Iraq.

We note from the report that a number of Iraqi political leaders have indicated their willingness to play a constructive role in national dialogue and reconciliation as a way of ensuring sustainable and lasting peace. In spite of progress made, there remain key challenges. I would like to mention a few of them.

One challenge is to develop an effective security sector, as well as civil and social services capacities. A second is the delivery of reconstruction, development and humanitarian assistance. A third is the protection of human rights and national reconciliation as well as judicial and legal reform, which are needed in order to strengthen the rule of law in Iraq. The fourth is the eradication of acts of terrorism and violence. Finally, the return of refugees and internally displaced persons needs to be facilitated. On this last point, we are happy to note the increasing returns of Iraqis to their country.

We note that despite these numerous socio-economic challenges, the Government of Iraq continues to make commendable efforts to meet internationally agreed development targets, including the Millennium Development Goals. In this regard, we welcome the Paris Club's cancellation of about 80 per cent of Iraq's debt, as well as the establishment of an Iraq Partners Forum. There is no doubt that this will go a long way in helping Iraq realize the targets set out in the International Compact for Iraq.

Uganda welcomes the commitments made to the Iraq Trust Fund, amounting to $1.36 billion as of December 2008. We call upon the Government of Iraq and international partners to ensure that the approved projects and programmes are implemented expeditiously while ensuring that they create an impact in the reconstruction of Iraq and improve the standards of living of the people of Iraq.

Finally, in spite of the economic challenges, there is a need to ensure that public funding for reconstruction and development activities is not unduly reduced, as this would affect the recovery process.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): I would first like to thank Special Representative Staffan de Mistura and the Permanent Representative of Iraq, Ambassador Al Bayati, for their extensive briefings.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation for the excellent worked carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Their dedication and commitment to help Iraq accomplish its goals are indeed most commendable.

As a neighbour of Iraq, Turkey is particularly interested in the promotion of stability and the advancement of security in Iraq. We have equally good relations with all segments of the Iraqi population, be they Arabs, Kurds or Turkmens. Our only message is one of good will and cooperation.

That is why we are happy to see that, after many years of war, internal strife and destruction, Iraq is finally striving towards a more sustainable environment of security and stability. The Iraqi people greatly deserve to enjoy peace and prosperity.

It was against that backdrop that we closely followed the provincial elections held in late January, including by sending observers from Turkey. Overall, despite certain shortcomings, the elections served their purpose quite successfully. They helped to bridge an important gap in representation in Iraqi politics. They also reinforced the democratic process in Iraq.

In short, Iraq has made a good start in 2009, a year that, we believe, will be crucial in shaping its future. Indeed, the provincial elections, as important as they might be, are only a first step in the consolidation of democracy and democratization in Iraq. There are certain challenges that remain to be addressed, such as reviewing the Constitution in a way that will unify

Iraqis as a whole; settling the issues of the disputed internal administrative boundaries and, in particular, the status of Kirkuk in a way that will help preserve the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq; peacefully transferring security responsibilities to the Iraqi Security Forces in a way that will not create a power vacuum in the country after the withdrawal of the multinational force; adopting the long-overdue hydrocarbon resources law in a way that will create an investment-friendly environment and help all Iraqis to benefit fully from their country's strategic energy resources; and reaching an accord on income-sharing arrangements in a way that will strengthen the sense of Iraqi nationhood and union. These are all issues of priority.

The parliamentary elections to be held at the end of this year will be another important milestone in the democratic evolution of Iraq. We hope that, by that time, these priority issues will have been resolved in a constructive and consensual manner, making it possible for these achievements to be crowned with fair and free elections.

I know that the wide array of issues to which I have just referred present a most daunting task. However, failure is not an option. In that regard, we believe that a three-pronged process is best suited to enabling us to attain our common objectives in Iraq.

The first aspect of this joint venture concerns the responsibility of Iraqis themselves. By that, I mean the obligation of all political parties in Iraq to work with one another in good faith and cooperation with a view to ensuring that the solutions to many of the predicaments being faced will be found through compromise rather than confrontation. We hope and expect that the political representatives of the Iraqi people will rise to the occasion and reconcile their differences. The Iraqi people have already rewarded those who have made the right promises; now it is time to deliver.

The second set of responsibilities in this process lies with the countries in the region. Indeed, those countries, sharing the same geography, have a special stake in seeing Iraq effectively tackle these challenges, many of which have direct implications for the whole region and beyond. We must all do whatever we can to support the development and reconstruction of Iraq. We are committed to further advancing the regional cooperation to which we have contributed, including by initiating the Iraq neighbours forum seven years ago. The forum is now operating in an extended format.

Indeed, Turkey has long provided an essential lifeline for the flow of humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Iraq. Today, the volume of bilateral trade is rapidly rising, along with all other aspects of our economic cooperation. In particular, helping Iraq to tap its vast energy resources and to export them to world markets through reliable outlets, such as Turkey, remains a priority for us.

In parallel, our political cooperation has also reached an exemplary level. In that context, reciprocal visits by the two Prime Ministers have created strong momentum by further enhancing our bilateral relations, as evidenced by the establishment of the high-level strategic cooperation council. Our President will soon reciprocate the official visit made by President Talabani, which is expected to give a further boost to our relations. Taking this opportunity, I am also pleased to announce that, in addition to the one in Mosul, our new Consulate General in Basra has recently become operational.

We also attach great importance to cooperation with Iraq in the fight against terrorism. As will be recalled, the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) terrorist organization has long used northern Iraq as a springboard for its cross-border terrorist attacks against targets in Turkey. The PKK's presence in northern Iraq also poses serious problems for and a threat to the people of Iraq. Initially, we had our differences on how to best tackle that problem. Today, however, we are pleased to see both central and local Iraqi authorities showing more signs of cooperation in countering that scourge. Indeed, the trilateral mechanism recently set up by Turkey, Iraq and the United States to coordinate a joint response to that vicious terrorist organization has made an encouraging start, and we now expect it to yield more effective and tangible results in preventing Iraqi territory from being used for such cross-border terrorist activities.

The third and final set of responsibilities in helping Iraq to achieve its goals rests with the international community. Indeed, Iraq cannot be seen as a merely regional issue, because the future course of events there will have repercussions reaching far beyond the region.

In that regard, the United Nations must continue to play its important role of coordination and assistance

in the critical period ahead. In addition to the essential humanitarian and reconstruction assistance being provided by United Nations agencies, UNAMI's support for the constitutional review process — as well as for the ongoing work concerning the disputed internal administrative boundaries and the status of Kirkuk — is of great importance.

With regard to Kirkuk in particular, Turkey strongly supports UNAMI's impartial and neutral role in promoting dialogue among the parties concerned and in helping to forge a consensus on that sensitive issue. Kirkuk, which is a microcosm of the rich ethnic diversity of Iraq, must not trigger new disputes and conflicts in Iraq.

In conclusion, I should like to reaffirm once again our strong support for the democratic transformation under way in Iraq. Obviously, we are still at an early stage of this long journey, the pace and final destination of which will be determined first and foremost by the Iraqis themselves. However, given the strategic importance of this whole endeavour, we must all be generous in extending our support and assistance. Turkey is more than ready and willing to do its share.

Mr. Jurica (Croatia): I should like to begin by thanking Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, for his informative and comprehensive briefing and express our appreciation for the ongoing effort and commitment that he and his team are investing in fulfilling the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). I would also like to thank Ambassador Hamid Al Bayati for his statement.

Iraq is becoming a free and fully democratic country. Croatia expresses its congratulations to the Government and the people of Iraq on the successful holding of provincial elections, the first Iraqi-led and Iraqi-owned electoral process with the participation of citizens from all its communities. I would also like to pay tribute to UNAMI and its contribution to preparing and carrying out the elections, including with regard to the important issue of minority representation. In addition, we salute the serious, extensive and indispensable work done by Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission.

The peaceful provincial elections marked a crucial moment in the consolidation of Iraqi democracy. We hope that they will help to create new political momentum, which should be channelled into the national reconciliation process and economic development. Together with the major security gains that Iraq experienced last year, the results should now be collectively translated into lasting stability and tangible improvements that will be felt in the daily lives of ordinary Iraqis and will respond to the expectations and confidence expressed when the Iraqi people cast their votes. The atmosphere largely free of violence during the election period can be seen as the best testimony to the significant improvements in the security situation achieved over the past year. The Iraqi Government and the Iraqi Security Forces have demonstrated increasing capabilities and the ability to address security challenges.

The conclusion of the bilateral security agreement that led to the ending of the mandate of the multinational forces was another landmark achievement. We understand that the coming months will be testing and demanding for Iraqi forces. It is imperative that extremists not be allowed to undermine these gains or the public confidence hitherto achieved by continuing with sporadic and indiscriminate violence.

In the context of UNAMI's operations, it is important to ensure that the transfer of responsibilities results in no security gap for its facilities and personnel. As the Secretary-General's recent visit has unmistakably demonstrated, Iraq can count on the continuous support of the United Nations and the international community in this next crucial phase of locking in the democratic, security and economic progress made so far. We are glad to note that Iraq remains high on the United Nations list of priorities.

Croatia shares the conviction that the expansion and the increased activity of UNAMI have proved to be fully justified in view of the political and security gains witnessed compared to the previous year. It has proved to be a positive force in advancing national reconciliation, facilitating political consensus, engaging on the issues of minority representation and disputed internal boundaries, promoting regional dialogue, offering substantial electoral assistance, promoting human rights and supporting reconstruction and development. The recent establishment of the Independent High Commission for Human Rights, to name one example, is a tangible measure of its achievements.

As Iraq focuses on advancing the political process and socio-economic recovery, UNAMI has rightly identified federalism and hydrocarbon regulation as the priority issues to be addressed within the constitutional review process as requirements for long-term stability. Another priority challenge will be the issue of disputed internal boundaries and the status of Kirkuk.

On the recovery and development front, the International Compact for Iraq remains the blueprint for coherent international engagement. We are pleased to note a deepening United Nations engagement on humanitarian and development issues. Croatia continues to believe that dialogue and constructive engagement with Iraq's neighbours remains a critical component in the long-term stabilization of Iraq. We are encouraged by the trend of the reopening of embassies of regional countries in Baghdad and salute UNAMI's continued support for regional dialogue.

In closing, as the engagement of the United Nations is expanding and deepening, let me reiterate Croatia's full and continued support for the professional and committed efforts of Special Representative De Mistura and his team in their fulfilment of the mandate of UNAMI.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank you, Mr. President, for holding this debate. We also wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his briefing. We also wish to welcome the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Iraq.

Iraqi provincial elections were successfully completed at the end of last month. That is a major milestone in the Iraqi peace and reconstruction process, and it is conducive to expanding the representativeness and inclusiveness of the Iraqi political process. It marks another significant step towards having Iraqis govern Iraq.

China wishes to congratulate the people and the Government of Iraq, and we appreciate the assistance of United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in the electoral preparations. We hope that the Iraqi leaders in the various parties will seize the current positive momentum, put their national interest above all else and continue to promote impartial, open and inclusive dialogue so that the national reconciliation process can move steadily along the track of peace.

The improvement in the Iraqi security situation is encouraging. However, objectively speaking, the overall Iraqi situation still includes multiple challenges that do not make us overly optimistic. We welcome the strengthening of the capacity of the Iraqi security forces and we hope that the Iraqi security forces' capacity-building will be accelerated so that they can fully take over responsibility for the security of their country.

To consolidate the progress achieved by Iraq in the political and security fields, it is necessary to speed up the economic recovery and reconstruction process. We appeal to the international community to continue to help Iraq in its reconstruction and development, honour aid commitments and promote engagement with Iraq under the framework of the International Compact for Iraq. We encourage Iraq to expand its cooperation with neighbouring countries and give greater play to the role of mechanisms such as the meetings of Foreign Ministers of neighbouring countries.

Under the leadership of Mr. De Mistura, and pursuant to Security Council mandates, UNAMI has made good progress in promoting national dialogue and reconciliation and in the areas of electoral assistance, regional cooperation, humanitarian assistance and development and reconstruction. China highly appreciates its efforts in this regard.

We support a continued major role for the United Nations in the Iraqi political and reconstruction process, for which the international community should create an enabling environment. We trust that the Iraqi Government and the other parties concerned will honour their commitments in good faith and effectively ensure the safety and security of UNAMI personnel.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): On behalf of the Vietnamese delegation, I would like to thank the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for presenting the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Iraq and the work of the United Nations in that country (S/2009/102). I welcome the participation of Ambassador Al Bayati of Iraq and thank him for his statement.

During the reporting period, there have been many significant positive developments in the political, security and reconstruction fields in Iraq, including the overall low levels of violence and criminality, the improved capability of the Iraqi security forces, and the continued return of internally displaced persons and refugees. We are particularly heartened by the successful holding of provincial elections on 31 January 2009 in 14 out of Iraq's 18 governorates. We share the hope that Iraqi leaders will grasp this opportunity to build momentum towards national dialogue and reconciliation.

We are also encouraged by the steadily increasing international diplomatic presence in Iraq, particularly of regional countries, and the Iraqi cabinet's decision to allocate $25 million towards the construction of the UNAMI integrated headquarters in Baghdad, which we consider to be another indication of the country's enhanced self-confidence and strengthened international status.

However, we remain concerned about the serious challenges that Iraq continues to face. The rocket attack against the United Nations facility in the International Zone in November 2008, the disturbing acts of violence in the weeks prior to the provincial elections and the bloody attacks on Shia pilgrims in early January and mid-February 2009 are indications of a fragile situation. At the same time, the growing unemployment rate, the widening imbalances in social service delivery and the deteriorated living conditions of the most vulnerable groups — the vast majority of whom are women, children, refugees and internally displaced persons — are causes for concern. This situation may become even more serious in the context of the international financial crisis and the fluctuations in the price of oil.

Now that the governorate council elections have been successfully organized, the months ahead will be crucial for Iraq to consolidate the progress made and lay solid foundations for long-term gains. To this end, the quest for durable peace and security in Iraq should be a nationally-led process, which requires a harmonious combination of various parameters and united efforts. Throughout this process, the promotion of dialogue and national reconciliation across political, ethnic and sectarian lines continues to play a defining role. For progress in the security and political fields to take root, economic and social reconstruction must move ahead. We call on all parties in Iraq to put aside their partisan interests and jointly take on a national agenda towards the achievement of national unity, development and prosperity.

We commend the efforts undertaken by United Nations staff in assisting the Iraqi Government in strengthening institutions for local governorates, advancing political dialogue and confidence building, resolving the status of Kirkuk and other disputed internal boundaries, extending electoral assistance, supporting the constitutional review process and facilitating regional dialogue in accordance with Security Council resolutions 1770 (2007) and 1830 (2008). Together with the extension of UNAMI's provincial outreach and the establishment of permanent presences in Iraq by other United Nations agencies, these efforts contribute to the strengthening of the United Nations role in the development of a stable, secure and prosperous Iraq as enshrined in the United Nations Iraq Assistance Strategy 2008-2010.

At the same time, Iraq's constructive engagement with regional countries and the international community is critical to the country's long-term stabilization and reconstruction. We welcome Iraq's participation in such broad frameworks as the International Compact with Iraq, the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq, the United Nations Development Group Iraq Trust Fund, the Paris Declaration principles, the expanded ministerial meetings, as well as the regional working groups on energy, refugees and security. We support and look forward to contributing to the promotion of collective efforts to assist Iraq in each of its respective phases of development.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I should like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his report on the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and by thanking Special Representative De Mistura for having introduced the report (S/2009/102). In addition, we express our gratitude to all the staff of UNAMI who are successfully carrying out their duties under the extremely difficult conditions in Iraq today.

We are grateful to the Permanent Representative of Iraq, Mr. Al Bayati, for his detailed account of the achievements of the Government and people of Iraq and of the difficult problems that they are currently working to resolve.

There is no doubt that progress is being made in Iraq, but it is premature to give way to euphoria. We share the views expressed in the report to the effect that the situation in Iraq has recently been developing in a positive direction. The situation has improved in the security sphere. The Iraqi Security Forces have been strengthened. The Al-Maliki Government has consolidated its presence in the provinces.

It is gratifying that, in the assessment of UNAMI, the provincial council elections of 31 January took place without serious disruptions. In our view, the very fact that it was possible to hold such competitive elections must be hailed as a positive development. It is important that a growing number of representatives of Iraq's various political, ethnic and religious groups participated in the elections. The voting in the governorates marks a substantive element of progress in Iraq, specifically in terms of the overall political process and the achievement of national accord, which Russia has always promoted as a means of bringing about a reliable and long-term political settlement in Iraq. However, some problems did arise, including low voter turnout, which, in Baghdad, reached barely 40 per cent. This speaks to the fact that virtually half of the population has not yet taken civic ownership of key issues in the life of the country and in the prospects for the development of Iraq. Furthermore, important segments of the Iraqi population, such as refugees and displaced persons, were not able to participate and remained beyond the margins of the electoral campaign.

The report notes that the terrorist underground continues to have substantial potential in Iraq. A significant segment of Iraqi society rejects the presence of foreign forces in the country, even when such forces are governed by specific rules and limited in time by the status-of-forces agreement. In that regard, we await the popular referendum on the security agreement to be held by 31 July 2009, which should formalize the attitude of the Iraqis to such agreements once and for all.

Other major and potentially explosive problems include those described in detail in the report: human rights violations, violence perpetrated by national law enforcement personnel and the situation in prisons and detention centres. The failure to settle these problems is creating fertile ground for new outbursts of strife among various groups and for the activity of terrorists. We believe that the Government of Iraq will be able to overcome these existing difficulties by working in close cooperation with UNAMI. The establishment of the Independent High Commission for Human Rights was an important step to that end.

Several other questions must also be resolved, including the delineation of the competencies between the federal centre and the regions; the establishment of autonomous regions, concerning which there is a lively ongoing discussion in Iraqi society; the definition of administrative borders, including of Kirkuk; and the adoption into the Constitution of previously agreed changes that expand the potential for participation in managing the country by representatives of all of the communities living there. Finalizing these complex objectives, which will determine the future of Iraq, requires compromises and, most important, genuine dialogue that could yield the appropriate solutions to achieve national harmony and to preserve unity and the territorial integrity of Iraq. We wish the Government and people of Iraq every success in doing so.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. De Mistura, and the Permanent Representative of Iraq, Ambassador Al Bayati, for their statements.

Like previous speakers, we are happy to see that the security environment has made it possible to carry out a successful electoral process, marked by an encouraging level of voter participation and by the absence — or by only a very small number — of incidents. In this respect, my delegation commends the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), in particular the work it undertook jointly with the Independent High Electoral Commission to ensure the participation of Iraqi citizens. This undoubtedly constitutes the best of its recent achievements. My delegation trusts in the success of subsequent processes to broaden the legitimacy of the Government, further promote reconciliation and strengthen the legitimacy of institutions.

My delegation welcomes the improvement in the economic situation. In this context, we believe that the financial support that Iraq is receiving should be provided in a framework that enables supervision of internal investment and promotes private enterprise at the local level. In this respect, we see the implementation of the private sector development programme under the recently signed United Nations Iraq Assistance Strategy as a positive development.

Of course, we support the proposal contained in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2009/102) that the support of the international community be systematically focused on those areas in which humanitarian and development indicators register the greatest disadvantage. In our view, one area of priority should be combating food insecurity in the southern part of the country.

All efforts at reconciliation must be accompanied by efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, of which the system of the administration of justice is without doubt a component of fundamental importance. Capacity-building in the judicial sector is a priority area that requires the support of an institutional framework of cooperation with other institutions competent in this area.

My delegation is concerned about the persistence of human rights violations. Independent of their statistical significance, we urge that the necessary action be taken to reduce the number of so-called honour crimes. We recognize the positive steps taken in the field of human rights, in particular the establishment of the Independent Commission, which we hope will serve as an instrument for the protection and promotion of such rights.

In conclusion, I congratulate Iraq on its progress not only towards reconciliation and institutional capacity-building, but also in normalizing its relations with its neighbours; on the growing international recognition of its efforts to normalize its national situation; and on its efforts to improve the well-being of the Iraqi people.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I should like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2009/102) and Special Representative Staffan de Mistura and his staff for their exceptional service and performance every day in Iraq.

I also want to thank Ambassador Al Bayati of Iraq for his important remarks and to congratulate his Government and the people of Iraq on the important and positive progress that they have achieved of late.

With our shared strategic interests at stake, thousands of brave Americans in harm's way, and the future of millions of Iraqis in the balance, Iraq remains an issue of great importance to the United States, but one on which the new Administration will steer a new course. The American and coalition troops, the international diplomatic corps, aid workers and the staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), who are all focused on building a future of peace, security and stability in Iraq, have performed magnificently, and we salute their accomplishments and sacrifices.

Iraqi and American interests alike will best be served by the safe and responsible redeployment of United States forces from Iraq, by support for Iraqis as they assume full responsibility for their sovereign nation, and by the encouragement of other nations to join in helping to stabilize the region and to deploy a broader array of tools to eliminate the ongoing threat of Al-Qaida-affiliated terrorism.

With the end of the coalition's mandate on 31 December, we marked a new beginning with Iraq as a friend and a partner working to establish open and democratic rule and to advance peace and cooperation with its neighbours and the wider world. Even so, a sovereign Iraq continues to look to the international community for support in these areas, and we encourage Member States to help Iraq to strengthen its democratic institutions, bring its displaced citizens back home, strengthen its democracy and respect for the rule of law, and deepen its productive relations with all of its neighbours even as it works to continue to strengthen and build its economy.

The United States will never forget the enormous price this institution paid in Iraq. We will always honour the ultimate sacrifice made by Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues, who gave their lives in the attempt to build a new Iraq and who dedicated themselves throughout their careers to the fight for a more peaceful, lawful and decent world.

We salute the critically important role that the United Nations continues to play in Iraq. Under the leadership of Special Representative De Mistura and at the invitation of the Iraqi Government, UNAMI has expanded and enhanced its presence in Iraq. Its work is as far-ranging as it is important — advancing national reconciliation, helping to resolve disputes over internal boundaries, ensuring that Iraqi elections are free and fair, and helping those, including refugees and the internally displaced, whose lives have been upended by the turmoil of war. On behalf of the United States, I am proud to offer our full support to UNAMI's work. The United States is grateful to Special Representative

De Mistura and his staff for their accomplishments and resolve.

Let me spend a few moments on one development in which UNAMI's efforts have been particularly helpful. Iraq, as we have just been discussing, recently held provincial elections in which the nation's voters chose new councils in 14 of Iraq's 18 provinces. That free and peaceful vote, with its widely respected legitimacy, was a heartening moment in the evolution of Iraqi democracy. Voter participation was high, candidates from all of Iraq's major parties and communities ran hard, and the elections were unmarred by boycotts, significant violence or major disruptions. The Independent High Electoral Commission rose to the challenge here, and UNAMI played an important supporting role, providing technical assistance and advice rooted in long United Nations experience.

We most importantly congratulate the Government and people of Iraq, who deserve the greatest credit for this stirring demonstration of peaceful political change. I was personally moved by the sight of the Iraqi police officers who helped to secure the polling places and to protect ordinary voters determined to cast their ballots. We hope that, with the help of UNAMI and the international community, Iraqis will be similarly encouraged by the national elections that are to be held later this year.

I would like to draw particular attention today to an area in which more work and a greater sense of urgency are required from all of us: the plight of millions of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons, who constitute one of the largest refugee populations in the world today. Iraqi refugees face increasingly difficult circumstances in their host countries: rising food prices, rents they can no longer meet, and dwindling personal resources. All these conditions have heightened the spectre of poverty and despair.

Thus, even as we commend host countries for their generosity, we urge the international community to intensify its efforts to take in the desperate and the vulnerable; to ensure that non-governmental organizations, host countries and others can provide dignified lives and sheltering havens to those already in their care; to help the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF and the World Food Programme to provide additional aid to the needy; and to help the Government of Iraq to develop the capacities and conditions that will let those uprooted by war return home in peace.

The United States will support Iraq's continuing development as a democratic country in which all communities can join in shaping the political, social and economic life of a nation that protects the human and civil rights of all of its citizens — a nation that lives in peace with its neighbours and the international community. The United States will move responsibly and safely to reduce our military presence in Iraq. Our bilateral security agreement with Iraq will frame the path ahead, and the process of redeploying our combat troops will be conducted in consultation with the Government of Iraq and with its support.

This carefully managed commitment to ending the war in no way diminishes the United States long-term support for a sovereign, stable, democratic and prosperous Iraq that is a force for peace in a turbulent region. Indeed, we have already signed a broad agreement with Iraq that sets out a long-term programme for cooperation in fields ranging from education to trade, technology and common efforts to meet the energy challenges of the new century. The United States and the Government of Iraq are already working to establish a strong foundation for future cooperation and an ongoing partnership that benefits both of our free and sovereign peoples and the region.

Our approach to Iraq must indeed also be understood in a larger regional context. The responsible draw-down of United States forces in Iraq will give us additional flexibility in Afghanistan. At the same time, the United States will vigorously pursue a comprehensive strategy in the Middle East. That strategy will address the security needs of Israel and the legitimate political and economic aspirations of the Palestinian people. It will seek an end to Iran's ambition to acquire an illicit nuclear capacity and its support for terrorism. It will aim to encourage both Iran and Syria to become constructive regional actors, and it will deepen our ties with our partners in the region to pursue common efforts to secure a broad and sustained peace.

This is a new course, but it is the right one for the future of Iraq, for the stability of the region and, ultimately, for our shared security and well-being.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity, as representative of Japan.

I would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his very helpful report. Japan wholeheartedly supports and backs the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). I express profound gratitude to all the staff of UNAMI, who work under difficult conditions. We express our sincere condolences to the families of staff members who have lost their lives in a noble mission.

I would also like to congratulate Ambassador Al Bayati on his very important statement and on the progress that the Iraqi Government and people are making.

Japan is pleased with the positive developments during the reporting period, most notably the successful governorate elections in January. Our election observers who participated in the process reported the high regard in which they held the professional work of the Independent High Electoral Commission and the generally smooth conduct of the voting. I am grateful for the kind words regarding the Japanese contribution.

Only a representative and inclusive electoral process will carry the legitimacy necessary to gain the support of the people. The result of the elections will require political parties to work with each other to select their officers. Japan hopes that the success of the governorate elections augurs well for the future democratic process. We hope for an even higher turnout in the next stages — the national election and the remaining governorate elections — with the collaboration of the Independent High Electoral Commission and UNAMI.

Improvement in security is vital to the development of the country. The positive progress in the security situation during the last quarter is encouraging. We welcome the growing role of the Iraqi security forces. I take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the United States, the United Kingdom and other coalition countries that are providing security support. However, there are still disturbing incidents, and we condemn all acts of violence.

Together with security, we should concentrate on rehabilitation, reconstruction and development to improve the living standards of all the Iraqi people. Japan has extended $1.6 billion in grant aid for immediate needs in such areas as supply of electricity and medical services. In addition to $6 billion in debt relief measures, Japan has pledged additional support of $3.5 billion for the rehabilitation of large-scale infrastructure. Already, 12 strategically important projects, for a total amount of $2.5 billion, have been agreed. The remaining $1 billion will place more focus on development in the central and western regions.

However, there are still significant challenges that remain to be tackled by the Iraqi people. First and foremost, Iraq needs to achieve economic growth and improve basic social services, which must be available to all the Iraqi people, including displaced persons. This has become a real challenge with the sharp decline of oil prices. While the international community, including Japan, is ready to support Iraq, the Government of Iraq is expected to address the undertakings it made in the International Compact for Iraq. We are confident that, with appropriate technical support, Iraq will soon become a vibrant economy that can reap the benefits of peace.

Other challenges include the disputed internal boundaries, the constitutional review and national elections. The issue of the status of Kirkuk will soon come to the forefront. I hope that the Iraqi people will be able to find an equitable solution to this issue with the assistance of UNAMI. Political issues can be solved only through the political process. Resorting to violence to achieve political gains is totally unacceptable.

Another important issue is how to normalize Iraq's relationship with the rest of us in the international community and to achieve international standing equal to that which it held prior to the adoption of resolution 661 (1990). We very much look forward to the Secretary-General's report in response to resolution 1859 (2008).

We welcome the positive interaction of the Government of Iraq with its neighbours. We strongly call on the Government, as a responsible partner, to work constructively with neighbouring countries and the international community to work out solutions on all outstanding issues.

As we recognize the gains achieved so far, we note that 2009 will be an important year for the future of Iraq. I would like to conclude by reiterating Japan's strong support for the Government and the people of Iraq.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to Mr. De Mistura to respond to comments made by members of the Council.

Mr. De Mistura: I will say just a few words, simply to acknowledge the many positive, constructive comments and the advice offered by each member of the Security Council. We look forward to continuing to report progress. There will be ups and downs: we know it. But what we heard today will encourage both Ambassador Al Bayati and me to continue on this road.

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his comments. I look forward to his continuing to do a good job, along with his staff.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.